

## Testimonial

02/24/2015

Distinguished Members of the Appropriations Committee,

Thank you for being here and listening to the students across the Connecticut State College and University system that are brave enough to sit speak out on the fundamental need for increased funding to the Higher Education system here in Connecticut. My name is Justin Ahern and I am an undergraduate student at Eastern Connecticut State University. I introduced myself a year ago, giving similar testimony on this ever growing issue that is only getting more frightening for college students, faculty and staff around Connecticut. Our Governor ran on a platform that highlighted his, and our, concerns related to education in this state. Taken directly from the Governors campaign website is this:

**"Higher Education Affordability: The dream of a higher education shouldn't be out of reach for families across Connecticut. We have already put in place plans to help families save for college for their children but with the rising cost of a higher education, we need to do more to help students struggling with student loan debt." –Dan Malloy for Connecticut**

Now here is a news flash from Dr. Grey, President of the Board of Regents for Higher Education:

**"While we don't yet know its full impact, this level of spending reduction will almost certainly require a significant increase in student tuition and changes to how [Connecticut State Colleges & Universities] conducts its operations," -Gregory Gray, president of the CSCU system.**

I want to break this down for you from my point of view. Eastern, currently facing a hard hitting decrease in enrollment, has two choices: We can raise the tuition to attend our school, which many, if not of all of us, cannot afford, or, we can make cuts throughout the University. This includes cutting the jobs of student workers like me, who work hard to pay off the loans we are already having trouble affording. It includes cutting the hours to the J Eugene Smith library and the ECSU Student Center, where I spend about 80% of my time at school. It includes reductions in staff, police and security around campus, when safety is a real concern. It means no new hires, when

most of the Professors I have are adjuncts that don't hold office hours for extra help outside the classroom. It means deep cuts to the life of a college student. **It means deep cuts to my college experience and education.** And I get it; you're in a tough situation where you have hundreds of people at your door step asking for the same thing, money. When I gave testimony last year, representatives were kind enough to pull my fellow students and me aside and said "we want to help you; we want you to get the funding you need, but help us figure out where to find this funding". **I found it: It is (or was) in a bucket called the Board of Regents.** The bucket of funding was poured out into a Boston Consulting Group and a butchered plan called Transform CSCU 2020. In all the criticism I have witnessed in discussion of the plan, I have learned one main thing: EVERY SCHOOL IS DIFFERENT. Every school offers different programs and opportunities that are unique to the success of that that school. But we do have one thing in common; we can't afford to operate our schools at a successful level. So why spend all of our time and money creating a critical plan that can't and won't be accepted by all the individual schools, because each school has different needs? Why not let each school create its own plan, and then divide up the available funding to help the schools achieve their goals for success?

When more people have a college education, it helps all of Connecticut, because it helps the economy. It means that our workers are more educated, productive and have the willingness and ability to create a stronger economy. So what we need to do is to try to make college as affordable as possible for students and share the cost of that through public funding. Help us. If I had the knowledge and time to sort through a state budget to look for possible sources of funding, I would, but I don't. And so from me and the students I represent, thank you for listening. We're here, we exist, and we are scared to witness a decline in success for the colleges and universities that we care so deeply about and depend on for a better education and brighter future.

Respectfully Yours,

Justin Milton Ahern